

Handel

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HANDEL

BY

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HANDEL

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By J. A. WESTRUP

ROMANTIC biography prefers a humble origin for its heroes. The ascent to fame is thought to require a hovel as its starting-point. From this point of view George Frederic Handel is a disappointment. He soared to the heights, certainly ; but his origins were anything but humble. Long before his birth his father, a barber-surgeon, had won a position of respect and affluence in Halle, serving first the Duke of Saxony, and then, when the town changed hands, the Elector of Brandenburg. The family was typical of the prosperous middle classes of seventeenth-century Germany. That Handel lived to be a European celebrity—or, indeed, that he came into the world at all—was due solely to the operation of those incalculable chances that seem to wait on the appearance of genius. He was the second child of a second marriage. When he was born, on February 23, 1685, his father was already over sixty. The first marriage had produced six children, four of whom had died in infancy, while a fifth was carried away by the plague ; the first child of the second marriage perished at birth. In the face of all these unlucky precedents the late-born child flourished and prospered. He carried into the world of courts and palaces the rugged obstinacy inherited from his father and lived to become a national figure in England, his adopted country.

A gift for music appeared in early childhood. Somewhere about his eighth year he was taken on a visit to the neighbouring court of Weissenfels, where his father was visiting-surgeon and his cousin a *valet de chambre*. Here his success in playing the organ attracted the attention of the Duke, who urged his father to have him properly

trained. Old George Handel, a stern and bigoted parent, had no love for music and would have had a fit if he had known his son was to become a professional musician. But he was too sensitive to the value of patronage to ignore the Duke's request, and the child was sent to study with Friedrich Zachow, a well-equipped musician, who was organist of the Church of Our Lady in Halle. With Zachow Handel explored the whole field of music. He studied the organ and various orchestral instruments—including the oboe, for which he had a passion—and in composition was taught to appreciate the characteristics and merits of a number of different styles. He was already a cosmopolitan in the making. "I used to write like the devil in those days," he remarked many years afterwards. When Zachow's teaching was over, he went to Berlin at the age of eleven, and there won the interest of the eccentric Sophia Charlotte, wife of the Elector of Brandenburg and grandmother of Frederick the Great. The Electress had a passion for music and practised it vigorously. In her fashionable court Handel was acclaimed as a wonder-child. The Elector, anxious to have this prodigy at his beck and call, offered to send him to Italy at his own expense ; for Italy was then and for long after the goal of any serious aspirant to musical fame. But the boy's father would have none of it ; the profession he had designed for his son was the law. So Handel came back to Halle, and when his father died a year later he remained faithful to his wishes and pursued his general education in preparation for a legal career. Music was now a spare-time occupation, but it was still pursued with enthusiasm and Zachow was still there to guide him. In 1702, shortly before his seventeenth birthday, he entered the University of Halle as a student of law.

For a year he followed the path of duty and at the same time kept up his music by acting as organist of the Calvinist cathedral. Then his resolution broke down. Music could never be for him a pastime ; it was his life. He

burned his boats and migrated to Hamburg, a city famous for its operatic performances under the direction of Reinhard Keiser. There he spent three years, acquiring a richer experience than Zachow could ever have taught him and laying the foundations of his future career. The Hamburg opera was a curious hybrid of German-Italian, a mixture designed to please both the public and the snobs; but its musical style was a direct tributary of the great Italian river, and the theatre was an outpost of Mediterranean culture. In Hamburg Handel was fortunate enough to meet Johann Mattheson, four years his senior—rich, cultured, a born musician, composer and singer in one. He introduced Handel to Keiser, who engaged him as a second violin in the orchestra. The two young men were inseparable. Handel gave Mattheson the benefit of his already accomplished technique; Mattheson helped Handel to cultivate his inexhaustible gift of melody, till then obscured by too much pedantry. Even when the two quarrelled to the point of fighting a duel in public the breach was soon healed. Meanwhile Handel had been promoted to the post of conductor at the opera—which in those days involved controlling the performance from the harpsichord—and in 1705, two years after his arrival in Hamburg, his first opera, “*Almira*,” was performed. A second, “*Nero*,” followed shortly after. Keiser, who spent his life in careless debauchery, began to reap the fruits of his indifference when he saw Handel becoming a public favourite. He tried to re-establish himself with the public, but failed, and with his failure the glory of the Hamburg opera declined. Handel looked round for fresh fields to conquer. Soon after his arrival in Hamburg he had made the acquaintance of an Italian prince, a son of the Duke of Tuscany, who had suggested that he should visit Italy. At the time, full of local patriotism, he had disdained the suggestion. Now it occurred to him as an escape. Towards the end of 1706 he shook the dust of Hamburg from his feet and set out to cross the Alps.

He spent four years in Italy—four years of triumph. In Florence, Rome, Venice and Naples he was fêted by princes and cardinals. The Saxon, as they called him, showed that he could beat the Italians at their own game. In oratorios, operas and cantatas he poured out a stream of melody. The sunny spirit of the south was already in his bones. In Rome he met Arcangelo Corelli, the eminent violinist, and the two Scarlattis—the father a distinguished opera-composer, the son a master of the harpsichord. At Florence he produced an opera for Ferdinand de' Medici, brother of the Italian prince who had first directed his steps to Italy. At Naples he studied the local folk-songs and learned to employ the graceful, lilting rhythm of the *siciliana*. At Venice his opera "Agrippina" was the success of the winter season of 1709-10. Having reached the summit of his ambition he turned his steps once more to Germany. He had received an invitation to the court of Hanover, and the English ambassador at Venice had also pressed him to visit England. He bore the second invitation in mind, but for the moment preferred to keep an eye on his interests in Hanover, where he was appointed director of music in succession to Agostino Steffani. The post seems to have allowed him freedom to travel. In the summer of 1710, soon after his new appointment, he went to see his mother at Halle and from there to Düsseldorf to see the court opera. In the autumn he paid his promised visit to London.

His arrival in England could hardly have occurred at a more favourable moment. Italian opera had recently become fashionable in London society, and the director of the Queen's Theatre in the Haymarket was only too glad to see a young composer who had won such triumphs in the land from which all opera sprang. Commissioned to write a work for the London stage, Handel produced "Rinaldo" in a fortnight, and had it performed at the beginning of 1711. Its success was so considerable that Addison, who had written the libretto of an unsuccessful

English opera a year or two before, was stung to retaliation. In the pages of the *Spectator* he ridiculed the elaborate scenic effects introduced into "Rinaldo," poked fun at the sparrows which were released on the stage, and parodied the robustness of Handel's orchestration. But satire was unavailing. "Rinaldo" had conquered the town, and Addison's cherished project of a native opera was banished to the realm of empty dreams. Handel, flushed with success, returned to Hanover in June. For a time there was a lull in his triumphant progress. His duties at Hanover were not sensational, but they had the advantage of bringing him into close touch with Princess Caroline, the Elector's daughter-in-law, who was a keen and able musician. At the same time he maintained relations with England. He worked hard at the language, and, by request, made his first attempt at setting English words.

In the autumn of 1712 he obtained leave of absence and again set out for London. It is easy to see why. His success in Italy had convinced him that his gifts lay in the direction of opera, and he had realized from the production of "Rinaldo" that London offered the best field for exploiting them. In Italy there were other opera-composers to command public attention. In London there was no one. If he went over now he might have it all his own way. His first essay after his second arrival was not successful, but an opera called "Teseo" had twelve performances, in spite of the fact that the manager of the theatre absconded after the second. Handel had now made good his entry into London society. In course of time he moved into Burlington House, which stood on the site of the present building in Piccadilly. His gratitude to his new patrons appears in the dedication of "Teseo" to Lord Burlington, then a boy of seventeen. He was so far accepted as the outstanding composer of the day that he was asked to write an ode for Queen Anne's birthday on February 6, 1713, and in the following July he celebrated the Peace of Utrecht with a festal "Te Deum" and

"Jubilate," which brought him a pension of £200. These commissions and the unsatisfactory state of affairs at the theatre in the Haymarket were probably responsible for his decision not to write any more operas for the present. There was also the problem of his relations with the Elector of Hanover—a problem which was not made any easier by the death of Queen Anne in the summer of 1714, and the Elector's succession to the English throne as George I. For a long time the new king refused to have anything to do with a musician who had so flagrantly overstayed his leave, not to mention his acceptance of favours from the late queen, for whom George had had no affection. In the meantime Handel embarked once more on opera and produced "*Amadigi*" in May 1715. The King did not let his private grudges interfere with his enjoyment of music. He attended a revival of "*Rinaldo*" shortly after his coronation, and paid several visits incognito to the new opera, sitting in a private box with his women. Eventually there was a reconciliation, either through the offices of Lord Burlington and the Master of the King's Horse, who persuaded Handel to write music for a royal water-party, or through the mediation of the virtuoso violinist Geminiani, who insisted that Handel should accompany him at court. The practical result of this reconciliation was that the King not only continued to pay Handel the £200 a year which Queen Anne had given him, but added an extra £200 himself; and as the Princess of Wales, Handel's friend since Hanover days, paid him yet another £200 a year for teaching her daughters, he was assured of a comfortable income of £600—which would have been ample for his needs if his passion for opera had not led him to assume the rôle of impresario.

For the moment, however, opera was in abeyance. After the collapse of the Jacobite rising of 1715 the King decided to leave England, which he detested, and have a holiday in Hanover. Handel accompanied him there

in the summer of 1716, and having nothing else to do, passed the time away by setting a Passion cantata by Barthold Brockes, a Hamburg poet who had studied at the University of Halle. There were also one or two visits to be made—to his mother at Halle and to the widow of his old friend and master Zachow. At Anspach he met a friend of his university days, Johann Christoph Schmidt. Schmidt was now a wool-merchant, but his enthusiasm for the business seems to have been tepid. At any rate he agreed to accompany Handel to England as his secretary. Handel found him indispensable. With characteristic generosity he taught his son music and had the satisfaction of seeing the boy turn into quite a respectable organist and composer. When blindness cast its shadow over Handel's later years, young Smith, as he came to call himself, was a tower of strength. The devotion of father and son is a tribute to their own qualities of character ; but it also speaks volumes for the charm of Handel's personality.

On his return to England in 1717 Handel found the opera moribund. He made no attempt to revive it, but in the following year accepted a post in the household of the Earl of Carnarvon, who was shortly afterwards created first Duke of Chandos. The Earl enjoyed a reputation as a lavish Mæcenas in an age when worldly pomp and patronage of the arts were allied and esteemed. He had prudently used his position as Paymaster to the Army to line his own pockets, and when he retired devoted his ill-gotten gains to the task of living as a *grand seigneur*. In the private chapel of his palace near Edgware the Earl had an excellent choir and orchestra, and for them Handel wrote his series of Chandos anthems. He also composed two masques—one on a subject from classical mythology, the other taken from the Old Testament. "Acis and Galatea," for which John Gay wrote the text, was a brilliant application of Italian principles to English words; "Esther" foreshadowed the long line of oratorios which were eventually to ensure Handel's immortality.

Handel

At the beginning of 1719 he was once more drawn back into the world of opera. A company had been formed by a group of influential people in London under the title "Royal Academy of Music," a copy of the French "Académie Royale de Musique." Handel was invited to co-operate and was sent abroad to collect singers. He secured some distinguished Italian artists in Düsseldorf and Dresden, paid a visit to his mother at Halle, missed the opportunity of meeting Bach, who called to see him the day after he had left, and returned to England in time for the opening of the season in the spring of 1720. After five performances of an insignificant work by an insignificant composer, his "Radamisto" was given for the first time before a crowded house. "Many," says an early biographer, "who had forced their way into the house with an impetuosity but ill suited to their rank and sex, actually fainted through the excessive heat and closeness of it." About the same time Handel published a permanent record of his powers as a virtuoso—a set of suites for harpsichord, priced at a guinea. The collection embraced pieces written at various times during his career and was issued—to quote the preface—"because surreptitious and incorrect copies of them had got abroad."

In the autumn there was a fresh attraction for the public. Handel was becoming too familiar a person for fashionable taste. It has always been a principle of those who organize music in England that the best must be sought abroad. The new lion of the London aristocracy was Giovanni Bononcini, already the darling of Rome, Berlin, Vienna and Paris. His "Astarto," in which the eminent castrato Francesco Senesino sang for the first time in London, enslaved the town. Senesino also appeared in a revival of "Radamisto," but his art was not sufficient to ensure Handel's triumph. The great schism had begun, and the collaboration of Handel and Bononcini in "Muzio Scevola"—Bononcini writing the second act and Handel the third—merely made matters worse. The

Academy, however, had every reason to be grateful to Bononcini, whose successes enabled them to make a profit on the 1721-2 season. Meanwhile Handel had secured a new weapon in the person of Francesca Cuzzoni, a woman with an ugly face, an awkward carriage and a mulish obstinacy, but gifted with a voice so ravishing that someone in the gallery called out: "Damn her, she has got a nest of nightingales in her belly." The occasion of this outspoken tribute was Handel's "Ottone," produced in 1723. Its success was sufficient to weaken Bononcini's position. The Italian, however, was not defeated. He found a powerful champion in the Duchess of Marlborough and continued to compose operas. In the meantime the controversy went on, to the astonishment of those who were indifferent to the claims of music or the tittle-tattle of fashion.

"Strange all this difference should be
'Twixt Tweedledum and Tweedledee."*

So wrote the author of "Christians, awake, salute the happy morn."

Opera succeeded opera from Handel's pen—"Giulio Cesare" in 1724, "Rodelinda" in 1725, "Scipione" in 1726. They are not entirely forgotten to-day. "Giulio Cesare" has been revived both in Germany and in England, and the British Army has immortalized a march from "Scipione." In these and other works Cuzzoni and Senesino won honour for the composer and triumphs for themselves. But fashionable taste is not satisfied by a mere repetition of excellence; it demands something new. The something new provided by the Academy was a second prima-donna—Faustina Bordoni. To Handel, now a naturalized Englishman and composer to the King, fell the task of writing an opera in which both songsters could appear with equal effect and without prejudice to each other. The result surpassed all expectations. Cuzzoni

* The verb 'tweedle,' now obsolete, meant to make an insignificant noise on a musical instrument.

and Faustina, appearing side by side in "Alessandro" (1726), flung the town into a new turmoil. The rivalry between Handel and Bononcini was nothing to the passions stirred by the two divas. London's leisured patrons broke up into two camps and battle was joined. The expression is no mere metaphor. Ferocity reached its climax with the production of an opera by Bononcini in the following spring. On the last night of the season, in the presence of the Princess of Wales, not only the rival factions but the two singers on the stage indulged in an orgy of physical violence.

Five days later the King died in Germany. His successor, George II, continued Handel's emoluments and added to them a warm appreciation of his genius. For the coronation Handel wrote four noble anthems, one of which, "Zadok the Priest," has become inseparable from the ceremony. In selecting the words he faced the combined opposition of two archbishops and won. "I have read my Bible very well," he said, "and shall choose for myself." At the end of the year he once more embarked on opera. Unfortunately, the excesses of the previous season had left their mark, and decent people had no use for an entertainment which involved unseemly riots. "The Beggar's Opera," a ribald entertainment by John Gay, produced early in 1728, directed such stinging ridicule at Italian opera that those who were not disgusted by the passions it excited were laughing at its absurdities. Gay not only embellished his wit by setting his verses to popular tunes, but had the impertinence to borrow a march from "Rinaldo"; and when the Beggar in the Prologue remarked: "As to the Parts, I have observ'd such a nice Impartiality to our two Ladies, that it is impossible for either of them to take Offence," the allusion was obvious enough to strike the dullest wits. Worse still, Handel himself became the object of attack. His music was considered too elaborate for popular taste, and an anonymous pamphlet of 1727 made pointed reference to com-

posers who "overcharge and encumber the composition with too many symphonies." But opposition could not crush Handel. He went on producing operas. It was only the exhaustion of the Academy's capital that closed the doors of the theatre on June 1, 1728.

Even this disaster did not turn him from an operatic career. He decided to become his own manager, and having secured the patronage of the Princess Royal, set out for Italy to collect singers. His company included a castrato to replace Senesino, who had refused to return, a leading soprano, and a tenor, of whom an English lady wrote: "He sings like a gentleman, without making faces." In the spring of 1729 he visited his mother at Halle. He found her blind and paralysed, and could not leave her to accept an invitation to visit Bach at Leipzig. The new opera season finally began at the end of the year. It was not entirely successful, partly because the public seemed to take only a mild interest in Handel's music, and partly because the singers failed to please. For the 1730-1 season he succeeded in re-engaging Senesino and laid the foundations of success with a revival of the popular "Scipione." The following season was almost equally fortunate, but more important for Handel's future career was a revival of "Esther," which had been written as a masque for the Duke of Chandos twelve years before. This was first of all given privately in Handel's honour by the choir of the Chapel Royal, then repeated at the Crown and Anchor in the Strand. Princess Anne, who was devoted to Handel, suggested that it should be given at the opera, but the Bishop of London decided that the stage representation of a Bible story was undesirable. The only way out of the difficulty was to give a concert performance. So was English oratorio born, and with the happiest results. The Royal Family attended and the work, revised for the occasion, had six performances at the King's Theatre.

The success of "Esther" opened Handel's eyes to the possibilities of the form. In the spring of 1733 he brought

out the first of his new oratorios, "Deborah," which was performed in the theatre at enhanced prices. The innovation was not popular, although it had the King's support. Subscribers to the opera season did not want to be fobbed off with oratorio, and the doubled prices (a guinea for the pit and half-a-guinea for the gallery) were anything but popular. Aristocratic opinion, led by Frederick, Prince of Wales, was bitterly hostile to Handel's dictatorship. The common phenomenon was witnessed of wealthy persons presuming to give judgment in matters of taste. The Prince had a further motive beyond the snobbery of riches ; he was on bad terms with his parents, and by attacking Handel, whom they supported, was able to have a dig at them as well.

In the summer Handel visited Oxford with what one of the dons politely called a "lousy crew" of singers and players and produced a new oratorio, "Athalia." On his return he collected a fresh company and opened his opera season in October. The counter-attack began in December at the theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields. A new conflict rent the town. While the King and Queen shivered in the Haymarket, the Prince of Wales led his supporters to the rival house. Handel was pitted against Porpora. The worst blow came at the end of the season in the summer of 1734, when his opponents managed to secure the lease of the King's Theatre before he could renew it. Undeterred by this trickery, he gave a short season in the autumn at Lincoln's Inn Fields, and then moved to the recently-built theatre in Covent Garden, where the attractions of a French dancer supplemented the appeal of his music. The warfare was now at its height. The old rivalry between Cuzzoni and Faustina was repeated on another plane. Partisans raved over the merits of castrati. Carestini warbled at Covent Garden, Farinelli, the wonder of his age, at the Haymarket. Cuzzoni herself and Senesino were now merely the satellites to Farinelli's sun. Still fighting, Handel drew on reserves

which his opponents could not counter and produced his three oratorios—"Esther," "Deborah" and "Athalia"—during Lent 1735. The end of the opera season was less fortunate. A new work, "Alcina," was a success, but Handel, always overbearing to vain and stupid songsters, quarrelled with Carestini and lost his principal star.

The continual struggle was already undermining his health. He needed a complete rest from the double burden of composition and production; treatment at Tunbridge Wells was not sufficient to restore the breaches in his strength. But the necessities of livelihood compelled him to go on. At the beginning of 1736 he produced a setting of Dryden's "Alexander's Feast," and when the Prince of Wales married in April he composed an anthem for the ceremony and brought out a new opera, "Atalanta," to celebrate the occasion. He was now reconciled to his principal opponent, and the waning popularity of Farinelli was an additional spur to fresh efforts. Working like one possessed, he launched three new operas in the spring of 1737, including "Berenice," still cherished in remembrance for the exquisite contours of its minuet. The effort crushed the few remaining props of his resistance. By the summer his enterprise had ended in failure and his health was broken. Bankrupt, paralysed and mentally afflicted, he left England to try what sulphur baths could do for him at Aix-la-Chapelle. Less than a fortnight later the rival opera-house, a victim to its own pretentious mischief, came to an ignominious end.

Handel returned from the Continent in November, to all appearances a new man. His first commission was a funeral anthem for the Queen, who died shortly after his return. Then he turned again to opera. Out of the ruins of the two ventures of the previous season a new company had been formed, and he hoped, with a gambler's desperate courage, to retrieve his fortunes by pursuing the road which had already led him to bankruptcy. For the 1738 season he wrote two operas: "Faramondo," now

forgotten, and "Serse," known throughout the world by its first number—an aria in $3/4$ time and slow tempo for which the simple designation "Largo" commonly suffices. The season was a failure, but a benefit performance on March 28 brought Handel several hundred pounds and saved him from the horror of imprisonment for debt. If London was unfaithful to his operas, there was at least a large amount of sympathy for him as an individual. If he could not fill the King's Theatre, he was honoured in the pleasure gardens at Vauxhall, where a marble statue of him was erected among the trees. "The whole composition," said the historian Burney, "is in an elegant taste." Modern readers can judge Roubiliac's artistry for themselves by paying a visit to Messrs. Novello's shop in Wardour Street, where the statue is preserved.

Disappointed in his hopes of recuperating his fortunes through opera, Handel fell back on oratorio. "Saul" was written in the summer of 1738 and produced in the following January; "Israel in Egypt," the mightiest and the most original of his oratorios, followed in April. Between them he gave a performance of "Alexander's Feast" in aid of a fund for assisting distressed musicians and their families, a charity still administered by the Royal Society of Musicians. "Saul" is lavishly picturesque. The full-dress organ concerto in the overture, the brilliant martial music for trumpets and drums, the chiming bells that welcome victorious David, the harp solo with which the shepherd boy attempts to soothe Saul's angry passion, the melancholy bassoons accompanying the ghost of Samuel, the majestic trombones in the Dead March—all this is vivid and striking to-day and must have dazzled Handel's contemporaries. In one respect they were more fortunate than we are. They not only enjoyed the products of his genius, but had the privilege of hearing him play the organ, an event which became inseparable from the performances of his oratorios. The first printed record of these displays of virtuosity—a set of organ concertos—had

appeared in the previous year. "Saul," like its predecessors, had a specially-written libretto. In "Israel in Egypt" the text was taken exclusively from the Bible. The innovation may have displeased the pious, and certainly profane listeners were wearied by successions of choruses when they had come to hear their favourite soloists give tongue. Once more a masterpiece failed.

Active as he was in composition, Handel was still suffering from the after-effects of his breakdown. His comic opera "Serse," performed in 1738, had given him a good deal of trouble, and in "Israel in Egypt" he had frequent recourse—not for the first time—to adaptations both of his own works and of pieces by other composers. However, the trouble passed, and he was soon working as easily and rapidly as ever. In the winter of 1739-40 he produced a setting of Dryden's "Ode on St. Cecilia's Day" and gave performances of "Acis and Galatea" and "Alexander's Feast," fighting bravely against the severe frost which compelled him to close the theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields for two months. In the spring of 1740 he brought out a setting of Milton's "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso," boiled down to a strangely composite mixture by Jennens, with a new and insipid supplement entitled "Il Moderato." The work was not a success. Handel still had his enemies, and the production of two new operas in the winter of 1740-1—his last contribution to the stage—did nothing to restore his fortunes. In despair at the hostility of the London aristocracy he accepted an invitation from the Duke of Devonshire, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, to visit Dublin. He left London in November 1741, carrying with him the score of a new work written in the space of three weeks—the oratorio "The Messiah."

In Dublin he gave a series of concerts on the same lines as those in London—performances of oratorios, with organ concertos to attract amateurs of virtuosity. The result was more successful than he could have hoped. He wrote to Jennens to tell him that the hall, holding six hundred,

was sold out by subscription for six nights, "so that I needed not to sell one single ticket at the door." He was happier than he had been for a long time. Singers and players gave him every satisfaction, and the success of his reception encouraged him to put forth his best skill at the organ. Secure in comfortable isolation, he could afford to make merry at the expense of London opera. It was not until April 1742 that he gave a performance of "The Messiah," and then with characteristic generosity not to fill his own pockets but to aid a number of Irish charities, which benefited by the sum of £400. The new oratorio was a brilliant success. "The best judges," said *Faulkner's Journal*, "allowed it to be the most finished piece of musick." "The Messiah" was given again in June, and Handel left Dublin for London in August, without any definite plans for the future beyond the determination to have nothing more to do with opera.

"Samson," which had been written just after "The Messiah" in 1741, was sung for the first time in February 1743. Contemporary taste saw nothing objectionable in the text—a clumsy paraphrase of "Samson Agonistes" and other works by Milton—and the music made a tremendous impression, though the English soloists were anything but first-class. Shortly afterwards Handel introduced London to "The Messiah," which was less successful, partly because of the prejudice entertained by religious people against the singing of a biblical text in the theatre. Two more performances of "The Messiah" were given in 1743 and it was revived twice in 1745. The foundations of its lasting popularity were not laid till 1749. Jennens, who took the credit of having compiled the text, had only a qualified admiration for the music. He declared that Handel had "made a fine entertainment of it, though not near so good as he might and ought to have done."

In the summer of 1743 Handel had a recurrence of his old trouble, but he was well enough in the autumn to write a "Te Deum" for the celebrations of George II's

victory at Dettingen. The taste of the times may be guessed from the fact that many people thought this pompous and too assertive work the finest of his compositions. No one guessed how freely the composer had pursued his old habit of borrowing. In the spring of 1744 appeared an absolute novelty, a secular oratorio on the old Greek legend of Semele and Jupiter. The text had been written nearly forty years before by Congreve. "Semele" is a mine of delightful music; but tradition has decreed that one song alone—"Where'er you walk"—shall survive in our concert-halls. The opposition to Handel in titled circles was once more vigorous and vehement. "Semele" was a failure, and so was its successor "Joseph." Both works were revived, however, in the spring of 1745, and two new oratorios—"Hercules" and "Belshazzar"—were produced. These performances took place in the King's Theatre. The opera, which for the last three years had been a rival to Handel's oratorios, had now collapsed, and it might have been thought that he would have things all his own way. But the aristocracy were too malevolent to relax their opposition because an easy means of enforcing it had disappeared. Balls and card-parties were carefully arranged for the same nights as Handel's performances. The paltry might of rancour triumphed. Handel's health was once more undermined and his money was exhausted. In April he was forced to bring his subscription season to a premature end.

The blow to health was the more serious as he was no longer young. In spite of his buoyant optimism he was seriously disturbed about his condition. However, by the autumn he seemed on the road to recovery, and in the following February he placated his disappointed subscribers with an "Occasional Oratorio," in the composition of which he drew generously on his earlier works. The "occasion" was the failure, though not the decisive collapse, of the Jacobite rebellion of 1745. The final

defeat at Culloden in April 1746 inspired him to a further pæan—the oratorio “Judas Maccabæus,” which was written in the summer of this year in honour of the Duke of Cumberland, but did not reach performance till April 1747. The public enthusiasm can be imagined. An accident had made Handel a popular composer. He no longer needed the support of the aristocracy ; the whole of London was ready to hear his music. The subject of “Judas Maccabæus” also brought him the support of the Jewish community, whose wealth was not to be despised. For them he set a sequel from their national history—“Alexander Balus,” a work which only professed Handelians can claim to know to-day. More successful with the public was “Joshua,” in which the triumph song “See the conquering hero comes,” afterwards transferred to “Judas Maccabæus,” appeared for the first time. “Alexander Balus” and “Joshua” were both produced in March 1748. “Susanna” and “Solomon”—the first a light and even frivolous work—followed in the spring of 1749, and the same season saw revivals of “Samson,” “The Messiah” and “Hercules.” When the Peace of Aix-le-Chapelle was celebrated with fireworks in Green Park in April 1749 Handel provided suitable music for a large wind band. The fireworks were a disastrous failure, but the music survived the wreck and was repeated a month later at a charity performance in aid of the Foundling Hospital. Not long afterwards he presented the Hospital with a new organ and opened it himself with a performance of “The Messiah” in May 1750. He gave the work again the next year and every year after till his death, and each time the proceeds were devoted to the charity. With regular repetition a tradition grew up. “The Messiah” became an institution. Handel himself was fully conscious of its purpose. A noble lord complimented him on the entertainment. “My lord,” was the reply, “I should be sorry if I only entertained them ; I wished to make them better.”

A new oratorio, "Theodora," was produced in the spring of 1750. The time was inauspicious. There had been several earthquake shocks in London during February, and there was a general move to leave the capital. "Theodora" was performed four times before the slenderest audiences. In the summer, Handel, now 65, paid his last visit to the Continent and was badly injured in a carriage accident in Holland. He was announced to be out of danger at the end of August, but the experience must have shaken him considerably. He began his last oratorio, "Jephtha," in January 1751, but was more than once compelled to abandon work on it and did not finish it till the end of August, having in the meantime paid a visit to the springs at Cheltenham. A new affliction—blindness—was creeping on him ; its progress is pathetically recorded in the score of "Jephtha." He consulted an oculist at Guy's Hospital, only to be told that his case was hopeless. By November 1751 he was already blind in one eye. Operations were performed, but they could not arrest the advance of the disease ; by January 1753 the darkness was complete. He refused to be crushed by this cruellest of misfortunes. "Jephtha" was produced early in 1752, and even when he could no longer direct the performances of his oratorios he continued to play concertos in the intervals. The disaster lent a new attraction to the concerts. Those who were only mildly stirred by music could still find satisfaction in the spectacle of the blind composer seated at the organ, and when the tenor soloist in "Samson" sang "Total eclipse" many were unable to refrain from tears. The last years were tranquil. With the aid of his amanuensis Handel produced an English version of an early cantata, "Il Trionfo del Tempo," revising the text, incorporating adaptations from other works, and dictating one or two new numbers. It was performed in 1757 with considerable success. Apart from this he was content to revive his oratorios, which now brought him in substantial sums. The end came in

April 1759. He fainted after a performance of "The Messiah" on the 6th and died a week later, leaving a fortune of £20,000. On the 20th he was buried in the south transept of Westminster Abbey. Roubiliac, the sculptor of the statue in Vauxhall Gardens, designed another for his last resting-place. A more impressive memorial is the vast corpus of his music, since collected and published in a monumental edition of nearly a hundred volumes.

Of Handel's appearance and behaviour as a young man we know little. In middle life he became portly and his walk was that of one who had much to carry; in his later years his hands were so plump that the knuckles appeared concave. His expression was dignified but sullen, except when it broke into the rare radiance of a smile. Though he moved easily in high circles, he was never sociable in the conventional sense and preferred the company of a few intimate friends. His extraordinary industry prevented him from indulging in most of the common recreations of mankind. His only hobby was collecting pictures, his only vice over-eating. "Nature, indeed," says Dr. Burney, "required a great supply of sustenance to support so huge a mass, and he was rather epicurean in the choice of it; but this seems to have been the only appetite he allowed himself to gratify." Throughout his life there is no certain record of any interest in women. Like most artists he was temperamental and when provoked beyond endurance was apt to become violent; more than once, too, the burden of overwork and opposition produced fits of melancholy. But he had a lively sense of humour and a gift for racy anecdote. He was familiar with four languages—German, Italian, French and English—and was prepared to use any of them as occasion offered. In spite of his long residence in this country he always spoke English with a pronounced German accent and retained the habit of using foreign idioms in his conversation; but he showed a good understanding of the English texts he set, and his letters in that language are free from eccentricity.

In the later years of his life he turned gladly to the consolations of religion and became a regular worshipper at St. George's, Hanover Square, which was close to his house in Brook Street. His gifts to charity have been mentioned ; they were constant in his lifetime and were continued in his will. Through all his years in England he maintained contact with his family ; to several of his relatives he made substantial bequests, and a niece was one of his executors.

His career was exceptional in its energy and independence. The volume of his work—including far more than has been cited here—would have been enormous even if he had confined himself to composition ; but when we reflect that he spent a large part of his life as an impresario, the scale of his achievement is staggering. By sheer force of character and genius he made his way from a provincial environment to a pinnacle in Europe. From first to last he pursued his own path. He enjoyed the goodwill of princes but never demeaned himself to curry favour. In an age when permanent employment in a nobleman's household was considered a reasonable career for a musician he preferred to be his own master. He battled manfully against the cruel stupidities of fashion and won in the end the reward of popularity. Rapid composition with him was a necessity of his profession, but it was no less a characteristic of the man. He wrote fast because the ideas tumbled one after another from his mind. Except when he was shaken by ill-health his invention was inexhaustible. Sometimes he would fall back on adaptations, sometimes he repeated too easily formulas that had served him in the past. But these journeyman devices are trifling beside the heroic mass of purely original music which he turned out in the course of his life. That originality is wholly familiar only to a narrow circle of admirers to-day. Those who glibly apply the epithet "Handelian" to certain commonplaces of the period which he used with a personal dignity have no conception

of the range or subtlety of his invention. To most people his music means "The Messiah," a mere handful of songs from the operas, and an instrumental movement or two served up in horribly garnished form. Handel himself would have been little concerned at this. He wrote not for posterity but for his contemporaries, because music was his life and his livelihood. If we are disinclined to value his achievement, the loss is not his but ours.

A SUMMARY OF HANDEL'S COMPOSITIONS

Operas: Forty. The complete list is given in Grove's Dictionary under "Händel-Gesellschaft."

Oratorios: Deborah; Athalia; Saul; Israel in Egypt; L'Allegro, Il Penseroso ed Il Moderato; The Messiah; Samson; Semele; Joseph; Hercules; Belshazzar; Occasional Oratorio; Judas Maccabæus; Alexander Balus; Joshua; Susanna; Solomon; Theodora; Jephtha.

Also La Resurrezione; Il Trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno; St. John Passion; Brockes Passion.

Masques: Acis and Galatea; Esther (which also ranks as the first oratorio).

Odes: Alexander's Feast; Ode on St. Cecilia's Day; Birthday Ode.

Church Music: Chandos Anthems; Dettingen Te Deum; Utrecht Te Deum and Jubilate; Funeral and Coronation Anthems.

Orchestral: Twelve Grand Concertos; other concertos; Water-Music; Music for the Royal Fireworks.

Chamber Music: Numerous works for two or more instruments.

Organ: Twelve Concertos.

Harpsichord: Seventeen Suites, and various pieces.

Voice: Italian Cantatas; Italian duets; German and English songs.

NOVELLO SHORT BIOGRAPHIES

BACH
BEETHOVEN
BERLIOZ
BIZET
BRAHMS
BRITTEN
CHOPIN
DEBUSSY
DVORAK
ELGAR
FRANCK
GLUCK
HANDEL
HAYDN
LISZT
MENDELSSOHN
MOZART
MUSSORGSKY
PROKOFIEV
PURCELL
ROSSINI
SCHUBERT
SCHUMANN
SIBELIUS
TCHAIKOVSKY
VAUGHAN WILLIAMS
VERDI
WAGNER
WEBER

Harvey Grace
W. McNaught
Edward Lockspeiser
Edward Lockspeiser
Alec Robertson
Michael Hurd
Henry Coates
M. D. Calvocoressi
Mosco Carner
W. McNaught
Winton Dean
Frank Howes
J. A. Westrup
W. R. Anderson
J. A. Westrup
Marion Scott
F. Bonavia
Hubert Foss
Malcolm Rayment
A. K. Holland
F. Bonavia
Eric Blom
Edwin Evans
Hugh Ottaway
Gerald Abraham
Hugh Ottaway
Dyneley Hussey
Ernest Newman
Scott Goddard

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